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## Destruction/Creation in the Age of Capitalism

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Like all handmade objects, artworks will sooner or later disappear. Hannah Arendt, in her essay “The Crises in Culture,”<sup>1</sup> states very well that as a cultural object, its status above all is very different from everyday objects; nevertheless, it also is destined to deteriorate, if not disappear for various reasons. Fortunately, since the beginning of humankind, many of these artworks “removed from the process of consumption” have endured over time and are part of our cultural patrimony. However, other cultural artefact belonging to world heritage sites are being plundered for diverse ideological reasons, such as the group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria’s (ISIS) planned and perpetrated demolition of archaeological sites, libraries and even sacred places. To these terrorist acts can be added the destruction of artworks that, for centuries have been the collateral damage of armed conflicts, and also works that have been subjected to blunders of inaction and neglect, whether deliberate or not, on the part of certain political leaders. Faced with these extremes that have impoverished our collective memory, it may seem difficult to understand why, over the last several decades, the phenomenon of destruction is associated with creating in the visual arts and other creative acts, such as performance and the music scene.

Although initially the idea of creation seems to contradict destruction and is more in keeping with the sacred nature given to certain objects, since the advent of modernity, the gesture of destroying is often considered a positive act in the creative process. Apart from the deliberate destruction of artworks following a controversy or what some consider provocation, destruction, in diverse forms, is a method of artistic exploration. In the 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche associated destruction precisely with the need to revive the potential of culture, its degeneration the result of mercantile capitalism. For this philosopher, destruction is inherent in the will to create. And oddly enough, several decades later, Joseph Schumpeter in the field of liberal economics, will echo Nietzsche’s thought and develop the concept of “creative destruction.”<sup>2</sup> Because the process is based on technological innovation, destruction feeds capitalism’s new spirit of entrepreneurial dynamism. It creates new merchandise, new consumers and new forms of industrial organisation. Are we then not thousands of miles away from artistic activities in which artists often are found fighting the commercialization of their works and the worth being reduced to a simple pecuniary value?

Obviously, since the Renaissance, Western art has been displayed within a capitalist system. But since modernity, what is not made known and is occurring parallel to the phenomenon of commodification, which benefits a thriving art market, is the criticism of this commercial concept of art. In this sense, destruction in the field of art is often identified with the refusal of consumer society’s imposed model. Multidisciplinary artist Simon Bilodeau, in many of his installations, such as *The Story with no Ending* (2014), presents a dark image of the state of our world. For the past ten years, his work has displayed a vision that suggests a disenchanting view of today’s society. Constructing charred wood structures that appear on the verge of collapse, he encourages us to be aware of the multiple disasters that await us. From a different perspective, Guillaume Labrie, an artist known for showing empty spaces produced through cutting out shapes in various materials, developed works in 2016-2017 that included self-destructing objects. Among them is the bust of a caryatid that becomes pulverized. While this is not unlike the destruction of the architectural heritage, we can also think of the planned obsolescence of certain manufactured objects. Consequently, according to Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, even though artistic criticism at times is not very effective in a system that has the power to regenerate, this critical view is essential to create resistance “to establishing a world in which, from one day to the next, everything could be transformed into a market product.”<sup>3</sup>

Several texts in this collection of essays attempt to echo this in some way. Among the contributions, there are those in which the art practices are closely associated with a critique of the economic process. In his text, Mateusz Sapija presents the works of artists Michael Landy and Santiago Sierra for whom